



Miss Locke

By JAMES LANE ALLEN, *Author of "A KENTUCKY CARDINAL," etc.*



THE spacious, beautiful old rooms were pleasantly crowded that evening,—it was a ball,—and Gridley's introduction to Miss Locke had come about as a natural courtesy in a well-bred throng. He, with some one on his arm, had early encountered Miss Locke strolling on some one's arm. The some one with him knew the some one with her; they paused to greet each other; the unacquainted were made acquainted; and the two couples, lightly disengaging themselves from the entanglement, moved in opposite directions across the ball-room.

Brief though the meeting, Gridley bore away an impression of Miss Locke which began to take shape as an unaccountable memory of her. He had not been aware of the impression at the moment the impression was made, but he grew to be positively aware of the memory as moments passed, and it increasingly prodded him to take notice of its presence as a remarkable new-comer. Though, therefore, many delightful influences rained in upon Gridley from the shimmering pageantry of the rooms, and though he, with a dexterity acquired by not a little experience, threaded his evening path—his evening stellar path, for he was something of a star—from one charming woman to another and received from each the response of a more or less friendly or hostile intelligence, he continued perforce to think of Miss

Locke, preferred to think of Miss Locke.

He did by and by what it was natural for him to do: he went back to the incident of the introduction and reviewed it in detail to discover what small thing had taken place and what small thing was the matter. As the reward of diligent search, he soon began to recover and rake in certain minute occurrences which were as definite as material happenings can possibly be and which absorbingly interested Gridley as he collected them one by one and finally surveyed the tiny rich collection. Small bits of rock, shaken and studied in the palm of his hand, could not have been more actual, more unmistakable, less destructible, than the curious particulars which he now held in his possession and which he now believed had made it impossible for him to forget Miss Locke. These were the particulars:

When the two couples had met and while the acquaintance with him and the acquaintance with her greeted each other, during those few moments of his waiting and of her waiting, Miss Locke had put her hand to her temple with a gesture as if to brush back into place some disordered hair. Soft, ravishing music suddenly sounded its invitation, and as he and she thus waited, she had executed on the floor with the toe of one of her white slippers a movement as of a young girl joyously impatient to be clasped and drawn

away into the dance and its dreams, youth's dreams, youth's only. Finally, after he was presented and as the two couples started to separate, Miss Locke had acknowledged their meeting and their parting with a smile and a slightly suggested arching of her neck.

That was all—all at least that any ordinary observer might have seen and remembered. Assuredly little enough, too little for second thought. But Gridley was far from being an ordinary observer in his highly trained, over-trained world of perceptions and sensations, and to Gridley it was not all. Not half. Not the beginning of what he had seen, now that he held the episode of the introduction before him as a vividly glowing picture and was going over the canvas searchingly inch by inch. Here, insisted Gridley, was what rendered those ordinary actions of Miss Locke extraordinary; here was what made those little things not little, those plain and simple things not plain and simple, but mysterious and haunting:

When Miss Locke had put up her hand to her temple to brush back some fallen hair, there was no fallen hair on her temple to be brushed back. The gesture, he now recollected, had attracted his attention at the instant because of there being no reason for the gesture. He had been led to notice, by this same superfluous gesture, that her hair was perfectly secure in its arrangement, what there was of it, and austere lacking anything that might have to be looked out for, as a wayward, uncontrollable, superabundant tress. Next the action itself, the lifting of the hand to the brow: merely as a line of motion through the air it had been of marvelous delicacy, ease, grace, as effortless as a movement

observed in a dream. But this very fact had led Gridley to perceive that the marvelously moving hand was not a light hand. It was a thick hand, a heavy hand, all too noticeably crowded into a perfectly shaped glove, so that the perfect glove had in an ugly way burst along one of its seams. Again Gridley reflected that this was the only reason he had noticed the gesture: no such gesture was natural to any such hand, to any such arm. As for the impatient toe, with its captivating movement on the ball-room floor, it was not the dancing toe of the dancing foot of a dancing person. Beyond a doubt Miss Locke was by preference not a dancing young woman; the impression she clearly made and obviously desired to make was that, if as but a mark of respect to her intellect, she held herself above dancing (rumors of that intellect had indeed outrun her while she was yet on her way from college toward society). Finally, the attempted arching of the neck as the two groups had separated: the beauty of the gesture lay in the idea only, in the faultless intention. Nature had made no provision for any such achievement in point of fact. Miss Locke was *décolletée*; all too noticeably the arch was impossible: there was no architecture for arches.

Thus, then, Gridley swept his field of vision clear of all fog of mystification. Everything was as clear as noonday now: he had been constrained to think of Miss Locke, and he continued to think of her on account of a striking disconnection between what she was and what she did, between herself and her mannerisms, affectations. The result verged in slightest degree upon the spectacular, the grotesque, the comic. Nature rejected the

pose and invited the beholder to smile at the imposter. There took place within Gridley the faintest stirring of that vengeful scavenger mood which collects a mob to jeer at a bizarre character in the street. A little more of this, thought Gridley, just a little more of this, and some one might conceivably begin to follow Miss Locke around the ball-room, throwing things at her, as she deserved, for making herself ridiculous in a society where to be laughed at was capital offense and capital failure.

With curiosity now fully aroused, Gridley further tried to recollect how Miss Locke was gowned, but could not. Proof, he inferred, that she must have been gowned appropriately. But this very discretion in dress, again, this safety of good taste, only the more flauntingly defined the discovery that she was in part appareled in the wrong behavior. It was quite as if she wore borrowed jewels, the becoming jewels of another woman. For that other woman those jewels no doubt blazed as enviable brilliants indeed: for Miss Locke they were worse than paste; they were vulgar.

It was still early in the evening as Gridley thus tore the obscure flower of his little misadventure to pieces in search of its curious seed. He had meantime been turning the pages of a sumptuous volume of etching prints in the rich, deep, quiet library, having for the moment withdrawn himself from the other guests; and while he had thus destroyed he had also created. His mind, with strokes not unlike those of an etcher's needle, fine and sharp and cold, had worked upon the hardly traceable human matter which had so strangely engrossed him. Having at last given characterization to it,

he now triumphantly threw the plate away—that first faint mental etching of Miss Locke. And he closed the volume of prints and rejoined the other guests of the evening, amused and satisfied with what he had done.

Several times during the evening he found himself face to face with Miss Locke. He avoided looking at her. Why, he could not have declared, unless the introduction, with its distasteful discoveries, had left him becalmed as to any desire to know more. Whether Miss Locke looked at him, whether she felt any desire to know more of him, that is another story, perhaps a better story, on the other side of the wall—the woman's side, where most warm, sunny stories bask since Nature has allotted to her the southern exposure of imagination, play, and joy. Possibly Gridley avoided looking, checked by a sense of delicacy not to analyze further; possibly he may not have looked, checked by a sense of decency that he had analyzed at all.

One discovery he could not help making: Miss Locke was not a wall-flower—on the side of the southern exposure. She seemed to possess a serviceable mind wherewithal (the rumored intellect again). At intervals during the evening, quite enticingly, almost conspicuously, she strolled with some one or with some one else. He came upon her in a curtained embrasure in quiet control of two admirers; once he all but gasped at sight of a group in the appropriate library where she held the attention of three, actually of three men at a ball. Leading them, no doubt, through the mazes of some dance of the higher mind. Since women who came to balls, if they did not desire to dance with their feet,

must needs dance with their fancies, fighting for places there as bare-armed, begemmed, breathless encyclopedias. Miss Locke was a seated encyclopedia, and the alcove of studious gentlemen grouped about her were engaged in reading their encyclopedia without eye-strain and without the cost to themselves of buying a copy. And with comfortable expectations of the splendid supper ahead to revive them after their labors, added Gridley, keeping as always a practised eye upon the joys of supper himself.

What with scant evidence Gridley assumed the drama of the evening to be, then, was this, that Miss Locke was freely borrowing and as far as possible transferring to herself the graces, the charms, the winning points, of another woman as the means of furthering her progress on the road to a husband. On the supposition that Miss Locke's game really was this finding a husband by aid of borrowed plumes, Gridley believed he could have declared with proof in hand that she had set about the game in dead earnest. And to her own deadly disadvantage, since the alien feathers, so cunningly stuck in, so uncunningly sticking out, could have had no other effect upon Love than to impel him to use his own wings not to fly nearer, but to fly away.

A little thing happened late in the evening—one of Gridley's characteristic little things.

He was standing beside a mantel, with its mirror, and its shapely vases slenderly brimming with towering roses, smiling down upon and for the most part merely listening to an elderly matron who was a great personage in their social world, one of its old lances that did not become rusty with age,

but the brighter for valiant use in life's long battle.

She had chosen a seat where she could command a view of the ball-room, and where meantime she could have as a sheltering, palliative background to her extravagantly exposed figure some banked palms and flowers; for it was a canon of hers that a woman must never display her bare shoulders against a bare wall. Some enemy, probably feeling her own figure to be slandered and insulted by the canon, had whispered in revenge that while the canoness was thus mindful of not exposing her shoulders against a bare wall, she had not minded in years now modestly distant exposing them—when there was no exposure—to a bare arm!

Toward Gridley, in view of her biblically fulfilled years, her attitude was what might be called a posthumous passion. He was handsome, generously planned by nature, generously completed; sensible, but not alarmingly sensible, not so sensible as to keep one a little afraid of what he might say; and as she read the signs in him, when his hour of love came, it would be a great hour, a true lover's hour, which meant trouble for lover and loved. Meantime she watched his sentimental escapades in a coterie of women, his alternating indiscretions and repentances, with the exhilaration of a cooled-off old sinner delighted by the heated downfalls of a beginner.

She knew all that was to be known concerning any young girl before the coming out took place; and witty, wise, embittered, she allowed her wit, wisdom, bitterness, to spare none out of writhing experience that none spared her. Thus Gridley's mind as he stood beside her that night met her mind sympathetically on the banks of that

river which, like the fabled stream of the ancients, flows round and incloses the world—the river of ridicule, of which, if one fills and drinks his own cup, the waters are sweet; if he have to drink the cup filled and offered by another, the waters are bitter.

Miss Locke strolled past. She may thus have strolled past once too often for the modesty meet in a débutante, or with too resolute an air of starting out to trample under foot the weeds of criticism sure to spring up in her fresh path, thus being most woundable through pretense that she could not be wounded.

Gridley kept his face turned away from his companion. He suddenly felt some virtue within himself close the door upon his secret, lock it away from her. At the same time he was moved by curiosity to find out whether she had seen what she had seen, whether she knew. Weakly yielding to his curiosity, he looked down. She was looking up, and what Gridley beheld in her eyes was two bubbling wells of amusement—amusement at Miss Locke, indulged, but not explained. The silence between them she interrupted with a tiny twinkle of laughter. It was as though she had rung a little front-door bell as a signal that life was still worth while, that she was at home, and ready for visitors. The noise of it caused Gridley to lock his own door more securely as if under oath to keep his secret. With what avail? His disguise was torn off, his door was unlocked, his oath had been melted away.

"I see that you have been introduced."

"How?" exclaimed Gridley with quick feeling and not without some guilty color, for he still could blush.

"How do you see that I have been introduced?"

"By the impression she made upon you, of course."

"What impression? What impression?"

"The impression that is revealed by your look."

"What look?"

"Your look of determination not to share your confidence with me. Your very anxiety to conceal the very impression she made."

Gridley remained silent, but his companion took her parting shot, and womanwise she doubtless meant that the parting shot should bring down the game.

"They say she carried off the honors in higher mathematics. Some work among the stars, probably—learning from the firmament rather than later in the ball-room how one star differeth from another star in glory. She seems to have contracted from the heavenly bodies the unfortunate habit of orbits, roving restlessly round in space. Could it be Venus, do you suppose, with which she may have imagined that she has established some kind of planetary affinity? No, certainly not Venus. No signs of the influence of Venus anywhere, neither of Venus in the sky nor of Venus on the ground. Saturn, probably. Yes, Saturn. She thinks she must shine with a ring around her—a ring of men."

The close of the evening found Gridley lounging, smoking, reading, in his carelessly splendid bachelor rooms—Fortunatus at home—as he quieted down toward bedtime, which with him was always any time at all if only it came after everything else by which to amuse himself, he preferring to stay awake with Life rather than draw cur-

tains against it for what was Nature's dull void or sounding chamber of sleep.

As one who half reads, half thinks of other things, and comfortably smokes meanwhile, he was allowing his thoughts to wander from the book he held. They strayed back to the events of the evening and brought him again to the episode of Miss Locke. But often an occurrence, having dropped from consciousness as trivial, reappears, no longer trivial; and there must have been for Gridley some full-grown significance, some ripeness of appeal, in this fresh presentment of the dangling apple of a woman's game. He put his book aside, he ceased to smoke, he lay back in his chair with his eyes fixed on vacancy, as we say, when our eyes are fixed on something definitely not vacancy.

A moment later he got up, crossed to his book-shelves, and took down a volume that he did not often reach for nowadays—Longfellow. As if to burnish memory, he turned to a poem and read these lines:

And like an instrument that flings
Its music on another's strings.

He replaced the book, threw himself on a couch, and began to smoke afresh.

Some finer human instrument was flinging its music, some rarer woman was casting her influence, over Miss Locke.

Miss Locke as the receiving mechanism could not remain unmoved under the sweep of those wonderful vibrations; she could not as a woman reproduce even a faint echo of the beauty thus wandering to her. But she had so fallen a victim to the spell of the music as to have yielded to the temptation to claim it as her own, to try to

pass it off as her own, that human music of another!

Who was the other woman? Whose head was it crowned and crowded with locks that did escape, that did call for a natural repressive arranging movement of the hand to the brow? He had seen such lovely heads, sometimes when one of them was bared to the sky on a rolling green golf course, and a breeze blew a strand of the thick, lustrous hair across laughing eyes or laughing mouth. Whose arm was it that did describe through the air the effortless line of grace? He had watched such an arm, swimming beside it as it had thrust itself forward stroke by stroke under silvery blue water. Whose were the dancing feet, with the implied slender, yielding waist, consenting to be drawn away into the dance and its dreams? Feet that followed you hither and thither over the waxed floors and that you liked to think of as willing to follow you through the world, across rocks, into and out of thorns. Whose neck was it of softest purity of outline that did achieve the living arch as the intuitive language of its pride, its constancy, its innocence and delight? He had seen such a neck in ball-rooms, had seen them that very evening.

The luxurious bachelor rooms were very quiet; moments passed.

In what other particulars was Miss Locke equipped to imitate this extraordinary woman from whose spell she could not escape? Hardly in so brief an interval could she have brought into display all the borrowings she must have had at her command. If so much could be observed in six minutes, how much might not be discovered in—six months? Imagine, if such a situation could be imagined—

imagine a person making the acquaintance of Miss Locke and beginning to pass down the vista of a long series of visits to her—the secret Road of the Imitations—engaged in detaching from her one by one, visit after visit, each imitation as she freshly attached it to herself; meantime collecting a small flower-basketful of those plucked and misplaced and drooping roses!

Not exactly a creditable adventure for the doer of the deed, conceded Gridley. But Gridley boasted that Gridley's world and Gridley himself were not unused to discreditable adventures, being carried on day and night, and leaving no public scars or public reproach unless they happened to leave a public scandal. The best of the adventure would be the audacious humor of it; the worst, a rather ungallant pursuit of the truth, the running down of a not very laudable feminine trait by which women sometimes secretly prey on one another. It could not impoverish Miss Locke of anything that was truly hers, and it would certainly enrich the adventurer as an observer of a gay, hard, strategic society, in which the gaiety and the softness parade at the front and the strategy and the hardness prepare far behind the dark, unwatched scenes.

A tremendous experience it would be if, as the unsuspected explorer moved down the hidden Road of the Imitations, he should some day come upon the unknown herself in Miss Locke's company, walking with her, riding or driving, at an art gallery, library, book-shop, at some social function; if he should instantly identify the unknown by virtue of the roseate paraphernalia of his mental basket. Imagine him waiving the ceremony of an introduction and ac-

costing her: "So you, then, are the veritable rose-bush at last! I recognize you by your own plucked and wilted blossoms. I now see how marvelously natural they are where they grow; heretofore I have only seen how marvelously artificial they were where they were worn."

Another experience more tremendous still for the adventurer: if when he had sufficiently filled his basket,—after all, a mere common market basket, since its contents were Miss Locke's garnishings for a marketable marriage bargain,—if, having had enough of the adventure, he should brazenly call on Miss Locke, avow the whole story, prove the story by pouring out on the floor before her guilty eyes the contents of the basket, and coolly request her to cap the climax of the whole intrigue by herself directing his footsteps to the pilfered original!

Gridley went to bed laughing. He did not as usual fall asleep at once. Before he slept, a thing happened to him—a better thing, natural enough. The spirit of the evening, of the ball, of his later musings left him. It had become like the scraping of tense short strings scraped too long; like the insistent annoyance of a violin screaming its shallow gaiety into a tired-out ear, into a worn-out mood. The spirit of laughter was gone.

Another mood followed, bringing relief and quietness—a long, low wave of drowsiness creeping toward him from Nature's deeps, ocean of all our storms. With this burying wave of sleep, floating upon it as some tidal movement of the sea brings landward delicate filaments of a weed whose home is far out in the unknown, there drifted toward Gridley, drifted across his consciousness, a few faint, far

echoes—echoes as of music, music as from the soul of an unknown, an unknown woman.

They were very faint, they were very few, they were far off, but they were clear-sounding, touched with tenderness, touched with loftiness, touched with sacredness, touched with beauty.

Gridley listened. And, still listening, Gridley slept.

§ 2

Several months had passed. Gridley, upon getting home to his rooms one night, snapped on the lights and walked hurriedly to the writing-table where his mail was always placed during his absence. A note from Miss Locke lay there, relieving his suspense; he tore it open.

That morning, to end a prolonged conflict with an intolerable situation, he had despatched a note to her with the request that she appoint an evening when she could be at home to him. And would she reserve for him, give up to him, the entire evening? He greatly wished to see her alone and he ventured to ask that they be not interrupted.

Miss Locke wrote that she could be at home on a certain evening, naming it. She did not engage to be at home to him only, did not promise that other visitors should be turned away in order that the drawing-rooms and the evening might be placed at his entire disposal for such time as he chose to claim the evening and to remain in the house. She made no sign, allowed none to escape her, that a visit thus astonishingly urged aroused either protest or pleasure.

As Gridley let the note drop to the table from his hand and stood, disturbed and dissatisfied, looking down

at it, he realized that the guarded chiseling of his must have directed the guarded chiseling of hers. Often during these grave days he had questioned whether his could be written at all; if at all, how written best. But no care or counsel of cunning or gift or grace of words could alter its essential character or divest it of a purport it did not intend. However framed, it continued to suggest that he would come on the evening asked for to ask for Miss Locke's hand. She could not, the relation between them being what during these several months it had become—she could not even glance through his extraordinary petition without having the chief, most sensitive brooding of a woman's nature enforce the thought that a confession of love, a proposal of marriage, must have prompted such an exercise of privilege over her, have directed such an approach toward intimacy with her. Was she by the faintest breath of warmth to encourage his coming? Hold out her arms to him at the first distant sign?

But Gridley, continuing to stand there with his eyes on the note, was picturing the scene as it would actually take place: that after he had waited for Miss Locke to come down, she delaying through womanly misunderstanding of his visit, finding it embarrassing to come down at all, that when finally she did appear and hesitate a moment at the entrance to those austere exclusive drawing-rooms, what awaited her would not be the confession of a man's love. It would be a long, intricate, amazing, wounding, humiliating, infuriating explanation of how she had succeeded in interesting him in another woman. Of how she, quite unconsciously of course, by

profuse suggestions differing in sort, but marvelously blending in a single image, had all but created in imagination for him that woman's very body, very spirit. So that, moved beyond himself in a way he could not explain, he was there at last to throw himself upon her generosity, sympathy, forgiveness, and ask her to reveal the identity of this mysterious, magical, compelling stranger. After which, presumably, he, Gridley, would bid unfortunate Miss Locke good evening, with the understanding that he would trouble her no further with his attentions!

He turned from the writing-table and, unmindful of his movements, went over to a chair in which he was not used to sit.

A long time he remained there, retraversing every step of his experience with Miss Locke and arranging how least offensively he could go over the stages of the story with Miss Locke herself; most absorbed meantime with what would happen when, he having finished his story, she would begin hers. For there, there in her story, there in her confession, waved the enchanted golden harvest of his winding road—the Road of the Imitations!

A strange, a wonderful human road it had been!

Gridley had not with cool calculation followed up his accidental acquaintance with Miss Locke. He might never have made more of the ephemeral little episode of the evening at the ball. Little episodes of woman's ways were not new or few to him. He culled his pleasures from a garden of life where all the women of the garden were resolved not to fall, but where a number were inclined to bend—bend toward experience of the world, bend

toward knowledge of evil; where at times a number did bend variously and considerably, and where Gridley had taken on successive increases of self-love through having on more than one occasion happily participated in the bending. An unattractive débutante, suddenly appearing on that daringly tested and rather surfeited scene, attempting to wear and wave to her advantage a few borrowed plumes appropriated from some human enchantress operating elsewhere—no temptress she where excitements and incitements beyond hers abounded and beckoned.

But quite without design unless of those sightless forces which join or disjoin us along our herded human road as with the vision of unerring eyes, Gridley was again thrown into Miss Locke's company on another evening closely following the first. What happened then, whether something that renewed with greater stress his experience with her at their former meeting, whatever it may have been, Gridley did not, when free to do so, quit the society of Miss Locke. He lingered. A few days later he called. The call was succeeded by another. Then followed a long series of visits, stretching over months and carrying Gridley rapidly along until they had carried him far. Until he cried out that it was far enough, as far as he could stand it to go. For by this time Miss Locke had gradually led him to a point where a tantalizing, irresistible woman had become not only a reality, but a personality, just at arm's-length, at the very finger-tips of discovery.

One night, with an ungovernable impulse to touch *her*, he had reached out and touched one of her gowns Miss Locke was wearing—an imitation.

He felt sure. The beauty of the gown, its elegance, distinction, was beyond Miss Locke, so transcended her that it humiliated her, left her the plainer, the poorer, for being seen in it. One night he had taken from Miss Locke's hand one of the unknown's books, Miss Locke's copy of some book the unknown loved. Miss Locke's own books, as he had glanced at them, were of a different character, modern books, grave, intellectual, philosophical (the intellect again!), too weighty and too deep for him. This was an old romance of hapless young lovers, wandering on and on down the world through ages of human hearts. One night a faintest perfume as a violet's covered up in leaves reached his sense from a handkerchief Miss Locke toyed with absurdly. Miss Locke's handkerchiefs were not scented. One night Miss Locke with a sudden by-play of coquetry had seated herself at the piano—Miss Locke herself did not play—and had endeavored by slow, awkward movements over the keys to imitate those unseen, flying musical hands. One night at the moment of taking his leave he had caught from Miss Locke a phrase of hers, actually a fragment, floating bar, of her lovely living speech. No such words were natural to Miss Locke.

All the while he watched, he waited, he said not a word; he went on with his visits more and more eagerly; he bided his time, believing that sooner or later secrets are found out, that things false are by the very honesty of nature's laws forced toward a day of reckoning with the truth.

She was there, the unknown, somewhere near Miss Locke. And Miss Locke was busily passing to and fro, as a bee whose abode is in one garden

flies back and forth over the wall to an unseen garden blooming alongside where alone it can find what it covets to bring home.

But as more time passed, Gridley, whose eyes had been vainly sweeping the actual horizon of his social world for the desired discovery, began to send his imagination toward that horizon just beyond into which the actual imperceptibly fades. What if he had failed to find the unknown woman for the reason that all this time she was lying ill, never to be well again? Led by Nature from the human scene just as she was preparing to step radiant upon it. Was Miss Locke borrowing beauty from this mournful abandoned store, as another, in another heartless way, might begin to use her very garments, knowing they would never again be worn by her? Or had she already passed beyond the envy of rivals, leaving only the memories of her envied ways for them to ransack? If dead, thought Gridley, if he should in time discover that she was dead, he felt that he would wish to go, none knowing, since none could understand, to where she lay under the dark earth with closed eyes and marble breast and folded hands and dancing feet. Go there with something that no other woman had aroused in him and leave it there as something gone out of his life for the rest of it.

Gridley shook himself free of such fancies during the day and in the crowd, when lunching at some one of his clubs, in the family box at the opera, at the theater, on the polo-field, in court, in his father's law offices, where he was supposed to act as junior partner, able enough, but hardly hard-working. At such times he ridiculed himself for wandering away solitary

into scenes made visible only by the dead and sterile moonlight of the imagination. He even asked himself whether it was beginning to be a matter of health with him—him, the healthiest. But at night, alone in his rooms, the thing came back. The dead and sterile moonlight of the imagination came back. It flooded his vision, flooded his windows, flooded the rooms. The fantasy! The enchantress! The beautiful unknown was there with him, a presence felt, a being not seen. He believed he knew the very outlines of her shape, the very texture of her mind, her realm of taste, her gifts. He did not resist her. He began to wait for night to return, when she would return. And all that was best in Gridley's nature began to assemble for those rapt, mystical hours as sinful feet stumble toward a sanctuary.

About this time there was another ball, a great one, of utmost splendor. All Gridley's world was there, strangers from other cities. Late in the evening he was crossing the iridescent ball-room. He caught sight of that valiant old spirit who was to him the evil incarnation of many such scenes.

She sat as usual where she could command a view of the rooms; she saw him, and she summoned him with a dried, thorny smile. Young men meant flattery to her if of their own accord they approached her in some ironic moment of theirs; they were flattery of an inferior kind even when she could tempt them to come. With their endangered virtues still looking out of their eyes, they were as life's champagne, poured and waiting. And they brought back memories of years when for her poured champagne did not wait.

But Gridley, without a smile, bowed and passed on. He was at the moment in no mood for old cynics. At no time did he approve of any but young cynics, such as himself for instance, such as the members of his particular set. For them cynicism was youth's righteous indignation, its justifiable rudeness, its healthy, heavy, tramping rôle. He abhorred, despised old cynics, life's fanged or fangless failures. Now of course old cynics are Nature's repulsive testaments, to be read of young cynics if they choose; mirrors which line youth's road, by looking into which youth may see its own changing, darkening, hardening face. But when has youth cared to be warned in its course by the fate of others, or been willing to admit that the path it elects to follow can have only that path's natural end?

A moment later Gridley came back and sat beside the resplendent old ball-room philosopher: the wisdom of evil might avail him.

She overlooked the slight of his not having come when invited. What else could she do? Forgiveness is often merely our way of administering moral ether to an offense to which we would much prefer to deliver a blow. None of us might so often pardon were we not as often powerless to punish. She smoothed over a rough thing and opened upon him the banter of her favorite theme:

"She is not here to-night, then?"

"Who is not here?"

"Whom you were looking for."

"Was I looking for any one?"

"That was your expression. The expression of a man who declared that he was indifferent to every woman in the room on account of some one who was not here."

"It is true," said Gridley, with frankness that he had not expected in himself.

"But I thought every one was here! Who can it be that is not? Do I know her?"

"You may," said Gridley, yielding to more frankness. "You may know her."

"Then who is she?"

"That I cannot tell you: I do not know."

"Not know! Looking for some one, missing some one, you do not know!"

"Answer a plain question. Do women ever imitate one another?"

"We do not originate ourselves, we women. We are all borrowed plumes. Do men imitate one another? Are men borrowed plumes?"

"I am not interested in that—not at the moment. Not in the men's side of the matter."

"You are not interested in the men's side at the moment and you will never be interested. Our own weaknesses do not interest us. We prey upon those of others. Meantime they prey on ours. It is wolf all round—and fox."

"I am not interested now in the man's side and I am not interested in the universal borrowing. What I am interested in is this: can a woman, aside from the general borrowing, so openly and persistently borrow from just one other woman that she can actually begin to suggest the appearance and the personality of that other woman—suggest her to a man by means of those borrowings?"

"Why ask me? I am not a man. I only know as a woman that no woman ever has such an intention—to cause herself to suggest another woman to a man."

"Can a woman continue to reproduce the lovely little ways, traits, things of

another woman until the man who sees them grows curious about the woman to whom they belong? Until he begins to feel a natural desire to find out who that woman is? Can such a thing be imagined?"

"Why ask whether it can be imagined since you have already imagined it?"

"Can such a case actually occur?"

"Anything can actually occur. Does a day pass without the incredible happening? Are we not constantly being called upon to believe the unbelievable in human nature?"

"Can you imagine a man really beginning to look for the woman who is being imitated? Look for her among the acquaintances of the woman who is imitating her?"

"Again, why ask, since you have already declared it? And in such dead and dreadful earnest!"

"Can a man begin to dislike, begin to hate, begin to despise a woman who tries to capture a husband by such trickery?"

"I am not interested in what a man dislikes or hates or despises. Usually he dislikes and hates and despises what reminds him disagreeably of himself or what is better than he is."

Gridley waved aside the attack with an indifferent movement of his hand and pressed his own attack:

"And if a man should look and look and not find the imitated woman among the imitating woman's acquaintances, could he at last ask the copying woman who it is she copies?"

"Could a man walk up to a woman in a ball-room and cut her across the face with a whip-lash?"

Gridley started to rise.

"That is what I am going to do," he remarked pleasantly.

She put out her hand with a touch on his forearm and pressed him down.

"The lashed woman would be likely to answer! You would be left no wiser as to the woman you were looking for, but you would certainly know more about the woman you had insulted. Why not try a measure less extreme and perhaps more successful? If there is anything in all this, if you really know a woman who is imitating another woman and who has stirred your curiosity as to who the imitated woman is, why not give me the necessary clue and let me find out for you whatever is to be found out?"

Gridley recoiled from being led toward the sanctuary of the unknown by so dark-footed and lampless a guide.

"No!" he said rudely. He started to rise again. She pressed him back again.

"You think—but no matter what you think! I may not be—but no matter what I am! What I am *you* do not see. The good in me was driven far inward long ago. And it is there far inward that I live upon it. What matters it after a while to any of us how we appear? I 'm going to tell you something; for you are young and I am old, and the young blossom red with folly and the old blossom white with wisdom. The truth is you are cloyed, surfeited. Your nature has no chance to be hungry, to know the meaning of the poorest morsel of happiness to those who are half starved. Since there is nothing you actually need and want, there remains only what you can imagine and imagine you desire. I have known many such; I see them every day; you are one of them. You turn away from all you have toward something you have not. What you have is faulty and disap-

points; what you try to find is something faultless that will satisfy. But remember this until you are old enough to understand it; then there will be no longer any danger of your forgetting. Life is not the opposite banks of a river, a bank of the actual on which we stand and a distant opposite bank of the ideal to which we would often cross. Life is no such banks. Life is the river itself, one river in which the actual and the ideal flow commingled. That river is our one voyage; its waters are our only cup. This is the flower of wisdom from an old bush. Learn to drain the cup of the commingled actual and ideal and to find the mixture—*drinkable!*"

But it is the old who are concerned with life; the young care for even few of the living. The aged cynic spoke of what awaits all; the youthful cynic harkened to the lure of a solitary quest, the mystery of one woman. With scant courtesy he turned away from his confiding mentor and her offering of seasoned wisdom. Yet the time approached when Gridley was to remember it with a terrible searing of his remembrance.

For soon after this a tragedy drove him to the precipitate end of the whole affair with Miss Locke—the sudden death of his father. That brought changes. In so far as the lesser man could take the larger man's place he must now step into that place as head of the law firm and head of the family, upholder of the family position, pride, prestige. The catastrophe, the devolved responsibility, shocked him out of levity, shocked him into gravity, shocked him into his senses, into his strength. But it was one further change, profoundest perhaps of all our human changes, that recorded the

consummation of his bereavement. Gridley had boyishly loved his father, had still boyishly looked up to and depended upon him; and as often happens, new beauty disclosed itself in his nature when his father died and he began to remember him.

Toward this finer change one thing, newly responsive, yet not intrusive, made its way—the sympathy of Miss Locke. Her message reached Gridley one night in his rooms. No other message he had received quite so touched him with the delicate rightness of it. But he sprang to his feet and bitterly cursed himself for the revolting suspicion that even Miss Locke's condolence was a grace learned from another, and thus a stratagem, a subterfuge, a pose. Not even his honest grief escaped her game! For Gridley had by this time formed such a habit of interpreting everything Miss Locke did that the habit, as a habit will, began to cut him with its sharpest blades.

Then, wholly unforeseen, the climax of his relations with her followed next morning.

He had dropped in at a book-shop to get a work his father had often urged him to read, as he happened to remember, and he had found it, but lingered a moment, browsing along the shelves. Farther away in the soft day-shadow of the great domed shop some one else searched the shelves. Just as he noticed the figure, it turned toward him; it was Miss Locke. She came forward, gave him her hand, and without a word went out into the street. But in that moment something had reached Gridley more disturbing than anything within his experience of her. Not a mannerism this time, nor piece of affectation.

Gridley, saddened and softened as he was by his loss, felt sympathy sweep over him with what had passed. Why, he could not have said, unless it originated in a matter recently occurring in his profession.

Not long before, a case in court which he was handling with his father had required him to visit in a prison the ward of prisoners for life. As he had groped along a hallway, at a small barred aperture through the rough stones, the only window through which eyes within might look out, at this empty square a face showed itself, a prisoner in revolt against its sentence and its cell. Be it said to Gridley's credit that he had responded to the appeal of that face. He had made inquiries. He had fought the case back into the courts for retrial; he had fought it through the courts and had won the condemned's release.

A face at a prison window—strangely enough it was that Gridley thought of as he caught the look in Miss Locke's eyes.

This was the final force in the current of events which swept Gridley finally away. And this was the final thing Gridley thought of as he sat there late that night, going over from the beginning all that had taken place between them. He got up and walked over to where Miss Locke's note lay and read it again.

Loss of his father had not brought him any loss of vanity; rather, fresh access of self-complacency and self-importance. It inflated him at the moment.

"There will be no interruption," he said. "If other visitors come, she will see to it that they are turned away. I shall have the whole evening in which to tell her the whole story."

Sudden joyous emotion surged through him. He had felt this emotion repeatedly since his father's death, which had left him independent; for his father had never intrusted Gridley with a fortune, and it was this fact that had kept marriage as something beautiful, wavering on an Elysian landscape before him. Gridley in truth represented all that ancestors could do for him, nearly everything that he had never done for himself.

Joyous emotion surged through him: the May of life was in full leaf and flower all round him, and into the lusty beauty of that May he, as part of it, would marry!

§ 3

Gridley sat waiting for Miss Locke to come down. The great silent house seemed to admonish him that it also waited, waited for its fulfilling event, Miss Locke's inevitable nuptials—some time. Always the drawing-rooms had wrought upon him this impression of being a stage arranged by the inexorable love of parents for the faltering drama of a child.

No mere splendid house could have thrown Gridley into a state of wonderment, even of faint surprise. He had been born in one; hardly throughout his life had he wasted life in any others. But none other he knew so mirrored one still purpose. Rare, beautiful things—some canvas or bronze, some lamp or book or ivory or drapery or vase or chair or couch or rug, which travel in older lands could reach, search discover, heart desire, wealth obtain—had been brought together as blended servitors of one idea, one expectation, one hope—that awaited bridal which the unprolific years had alone apportioned to proud, disap-

pointed parents. Even the walls and floors and ceilings, even the silken and satin coverings and draperies, separately had the shades and together created the harmonies most favorable to Miss Locke. The very arrangement of the lights above and around was adapted to her advantage, however she might enter, wherever she might move or sit or stand—the heirless, the disappointment, the only child.

Never as on this night had Gridley so felt the whole meaning of the cautious and wondrous scene, remorseful as he was at forethought of the nearing ordeal: that here, in Miss Locke's own home and all but in the presence of her father and mother, here on this devoted stage of her life's precarious chances, he was about to pluck off the lovely tissue of disguise and adornment with which she was trying to eke out her difficult rôle, and, holding this up as an exquisite borrowed garment, all but demand that she give to him the name of the woman to whom it solely belonged. In brutality of truth he was about to ask that human nature stand forth nakedly truthful, convict itself of a course of deception, and take the consequences. With good reason he felt that the guarded place bade him beware, that every well wrought, well considered thing warned him to leave without a word.

One thought especially plucked Gridley as by the sleeve to draw him hurriedly away: that as night after night he had caught a glimpse of Miss Locke when at a turn of the stairway she crossed an opening between lovely draperies, he had been touched by her evident consciousness that she was not slight, not graceful, not attractive in feature or in person, and that in a terrible way the staircase which sup-

ported her surpassed her. Most movingly she stirred this feeling when she entered the drawing-rooms, with their softly concealing, softly revealing lights, in sensitive dread lest it be remarked and commented on that she did not quite come up to the expectations of the splendid scene, failed to meet the demands of the furniture. As a piece of nature she to herself fell short of the enterprise and handiwork of the architects and builders of the house, of its masons and plasterers, of the designers of couches and the weavers of rugs, of the potters with their poor clay. The treasures of the place were her trifles; they had been brought together from many lands for her enjoyment and advancement: but as she stood among them, they mutely discredited and repudiated her as the one thing in the rooms that was least a masterpiece.

Gridley was aroused from his reflections by the quiet passing of a servant toward the front doors. Twice he had thus passed and repassed: Miss Locke was excusing herself to other callers. It was true, then, that she had given up to him the whole evening. And Miss Locke, Gridley reflected, had many suitors.

Meantime she did not come down. Did she keep him waiting to remind him that he had taken a liberty? Was delay due to her feeling that to have come quickly would have been too quickly?

With no other motive than to dull the edge of waiting, he opened one of Miss Locke's books. His eye fell upon what he had not seen in any of them hitherto—a book-plate. Miss Locke's life was unfolding, and this was a fresh flowering point of her nature, one more true sign of how it grew.

The plate suggested one of Turner's

Italian scenes, with their far, soft, mystical beauty—beauty dreamed of. A group was seated on the turf at an open glade by the edge of a stately forest. One, a manly youth, held a musical pipe to his lips. Out in front of him a young girl danced barefoot. She danced for them all, but mainly she danced to him. The soft wind blew about her head abundant, unmanageable tresses—tresses which called for an arranging movement of the hand to the brow. One arm curved downward, with the palm of the hand at rest upon the slender waist. The other arm was bent upward, with the fingers of the hand between the open pages of a loved book. A springing foot seemed hardly to touch the ground. Her neck was arched over to the youth who played. There she was! There she danced! Grace, joy, youth, love, flesh, spirit, passion, imagination, ecstasy!

Gridley's gaze rested upon her spell-bound. He seemed entering upon some true path of discovery. Memories passed gropingly along the avenues of his brain. The flock of lovely little things which he had captured and cherished as belonging to the unknown—the whole flock of them grew agitated, and one by one began to fly to and settle upon the figure of the girl in the book-plate, as being at home with her, as being herself. Then—Miss Locke was coming!

She hesitated on the staircase as with last irresolution, as with uncertainty of what was about to happen; afterward she came on down very slowly. When she passed under the arch of the drawing-room she sent her glance to Gridley's face to discover why he was there, why he had come. Whatever else she discerned, this must

have been convincing, that in what he had so carefully arranged to unfold to her, love of her had no part. Visibly, unmistakably, he was moved, deeply moved; but visibly, unmistakably, it was not love of her that deeply moved him.

This discovery, however else it may have affected her, made her own course clear, and instantly she justified herself as belonging to the sex which can sink everything else in the need to conceal. Composedly, unaffectedly, never more simply herself, Miss Locke advanced in the softly concealing, softly revealing light, and greeted Gridley with exactly what would have been his due had no unusual circumstances cloaked his visit. From having been placed at a disadvantage by him, she reversed their relation and brought the disadvantage to lie against him. Her attitude made his own the more grossly at fault; and since he was of the sex which conceals less well even if it tries, and since he did not now wish even to try, he let himself be carried forward to unmask at once the meaning of the evening.

But Gridley did not begin rudely. The kindness of his nature—and there was kindness in it—had never showed more in evidence, more in action. Nor did he begin crudely, either; for he had a mastery of manner, as he had lifelong acquaintance with the resources and safeguards of good form. Nevertheless, no consideration for Miss Locke could abate the fact that she was to receive no consideration whatsoever; all the other courtesies were convened only to discover that the chief of their sisterhood was absent.

Few words had passed between them before Gridley broached his theme:

"The request in my note was unus-

ual. It was unwarranted. If I might explain—justify—" He broke off abruptly, then as abruptly went on: "There was something I have never understood, that I wished to understand, that I had to understand. And I had to ask." He looked at Miss Locke with questions banked in his eyes.

Miss Locke sat waiting something more definite as her expectation, more adequate as her due.

"I feel most deeply about it; more deeply, perhaps, than I can make it felt by any one else."

There was no response that Miss Locke desired to make.

"But not for the world would I have it cause *you* any unhappiness!" cried Gridley, faltering.

Miss Locke bent her head slightly toward Gridley. So a spectator might strain to descry what is afoot in a strange field. Her manner suggested also that she did not quite look to Gridley as the keeper of her happiness, the dispenser of it. Nor did her manner withhold the reminder that she relied upon Gridley to observe the restraints of good breeding. Both of them had inherited good breeding, had been trained in good breeding, had always taken good breeding for granted; was it to remain in force this evening?

Gridley smarted under the implications of her demeanor and deportment. He was beginning to resent Miss Locke's donning an impenetrable armor of virtue. The virtuousness of her manner was somewhat in excess, he thought, of the virtue of her double rôle.

"I felt obliged to ask you some questions," he exclaimed bluntly, and once more the questions were plainly banked in Gridley's eyes.

But again Gridley's resolution lost itself in silence, until finally Miss Locke drew his attention to his provocative words.

"You felt obliged to ask me questions?"

In effect Miss Locke returned Gridley's words to him as among the curiosities of the incredible to her.

"Not idle questions; not of curiosity. Questions to get at the truth of the matter."

Once more it devolved upon Miss Locke to bring Gridley to a realization of his untenable position.

"Could you make your meaning no clearer?"

"I can make my meaning perfectly clear, if I may."

"Do, certainly," said Miss Locke.

"Shall I go ahead, then, and speak with candor?"

"Is not candor best with any subject? Is not candor at all times indispensable?"

"Then I *will* be candid," exclaimed Gridley. For a moment longer he hesitated, then began: "Do you remember these lines of Longfellow's:

'And like an instrument that flings
Its music on another's strings.'

Do you know those lines?"

"I did not know the lines."

"The evening I was introduced to you something occurred that recalled those lines to me. Something like just that—like a musical instrument throwing its vibrations upon another musical instrument. Shall I tell you exactly what? It was the influence which another woman, some wonderful woman, was exerting over you. Shall I say just how I caught the vibrations of that unseen instrument, how I received the suggestions of that un-

known woman? In this way: I noticed a slight movement of your hand and arm. The movement was not natural to you. It was like the echo of another hand, like the echo of another arm. I noticed a movement of your foot which suggested another woman's foot. A movement which suggested her head of hair. Another which suggested her arching neck. That very first night, I say, I caught from you a few echoes, faint and far, of human music which was falling upon you; caught suggestions of the form and spirit of another woman. To me you reëchoed that woman, you repeated her, imitated her, copied her! That was the beginning—the beginning of all that has taken place since. And in all that has taken place since you have been doing the same thing—copying that woman."

The shaft had been shot, if it was a shaft; the wound had been made, if there was to be a wound.

For a little while Miss Locke sat quite still and quite without response. One change in her was observable: she began to look at Gridley as though seeing him for what she had never seen him before. And something like a light of understanding began to reach her, to shine within her, to break all about her. In that light Miss Locke sat revealed as unrebuked and unwounded. To deepen, if possible, the mystery, she did one thing that Gridley could not have imagined: she rose quietly from her seat and came and sat nearer him, quite near. As though the subject he unraveled, so far from offending her, causing her to leave the rooms, fascinated her and drew her toward him. And she now awaited Gridley's disclosures above self-reproach, his reproach, any one's reproach.

To Gridley, whatever else this meant, it brought assurance that he could proceed with less reluctance; if he could go so far without giving mortal offense, he could continue unembarrassed to the end.

"That night, then, I got the idea that a woman was throwing upon you the charm and spell of her intense and lovely spirit. During all these months of our acquaintance that is what I have felt more and more. While the echoes have been falling upon you from her, they have been falling upon me from you. You yielded to her influence; it captivated you, it captured you. Now I have yielded to her influence; it has captivated me, it has captured me."

Gridley waited persistently for some demonstration from Miss Locke. Miss Locke interposed at length a question:

"These echoes—suggestions—imitations as you thought them—what were others?" She inquired as curious to hear the whole truth and not afraid.

"One night a book of hers, unlike your books; one night a handkerchief, not yours; one night a gown wonderfully beautiful, not such as you wear; one night a suggestion of a gift of music, the gift she must have; one night a fragment of her speech, her very words; one night—" Gridley went on recounting, and broke off without finishing.

Miss Locke made one comment as addressed to herself:

"There must have been others; many which escaped even your eye, your count, your note-book. What were they all, I wonder. But—"

"At first I felt only the slightest curiosity. Then these little things, all leading to the same lovely person, be-

gan to interest me more. I might as well say that my interest grew deeper. I confess that I even began to look for the woman herself, to expect some day to identify her among your acquaintances, to see her somewhere in your company. As time passed, I even began to ask myself questions: whether she was lying hopelessly ill somewhere; even to ask myself whether she had passed away, leaving such memories of herself—such memories!"

Silence fell as they looked at each other. Miss Locke's next question was barely audible:

"And you are here to-night—"

"Hoping you will tell me she is alive! And to ask you to tell me who she is!"

Gridley cried out as one near a joyous goal.

"And this is the sole reason you have been coming here? The only motive in everything?"

"To find out more about *her*, if possible."

"And if you find out to-night, as you hope, who she is, as you imagine, you would not come here any more—was that to be the triumph of your plan?"

Gridley let silence answer. Silence answered.

"All this time she has, as you think, been exerting some higher influence over you? Revealing to you what was best in yourself? Drawing you toward herself?"

"All that is best in me has moved toward her."

"While my influence, if there has been any influence—my influence has been—"

Gridley let silence speak.

"You have believed I was taking advantage of some acquaintance? Or

of some friend? Possibly of another who was ill? Even of some one who was dead? Meantime all I asked was not to be found out—too soon?"

Gridley's eyes met Miss Locke's with full agreement.

"Yes, you thought all this. Did you think the note I sent after the death of your father—did you think that one of my affectations—hypocrisies? Did you?"

Candor, a happy virtue when at ease, can be a tortured virtue in its shame.

"I thought that."

Miss Locke bowed in appreciation of truthfulness.

The conversation went forward with inexorable directness:

"If you really knew this woman whom you have imagined generously and nobly, you believe she would win your love?"

Gridley's heart was in his avowal:

"I believe that! I have believed that! I do believe that!"

"As far as may be, she has won your love already?"

"As far as may be!"

"And did you believe *you* would win *her* love?"

"I hoped! I hope!"

"*Why* did you hope? *Why* do you hope?"

Gridley could not say.

"Your marriage with her would be an ideal marriage? You would enter upon an ideal life?"

"I have believed it!" cried Gridley out of his deepest.

"I think," said Miss Locke after an interval, "there is little more you can say to me: this must be the end of our story."

"It is the end of *my* story!" Gridley cried warningly, implying that he demanded hers.

"Then," said Miss Locke, with hesitation, but with decision, "I shall have to tell you about the unknown."

Rising hurriedly, she walked away from Gridley.

Miss Locke walked slowly to the end of the rooms. Slowly, she came back, passing before him without regard to his presence. She traversed the whole length of the rooms again; then turning, she came toward Gridley, her eyes resting on him.

Often our deepest emotions take the form of drama. The actions they originate, the language they employ, are the words and gestures of a stage. And we tread that stage, break our silences and voice our tragedies chiefly in order that they may reach and touch our own ear. That others should behold us and heed us is of less moment than that we should approve our own part in the play, bear witness to our own cause, and be moved by the spectacle of how life has entangled us, misjudged us, misused us.

As Miss Locke came toward Gridley, she was not the same Miss Locke. It was the same Miss Locke; she was not the same woman. It was the same woman, but she was a woman whom the experience of the evening had transformed. The drawing-rooms of her home had at last, indeed, become the stage of her life; the drama had begun with a profound shock to her; and she, the actor for whom the scene had been planned and long had waited, was to speak the opening lines in response to the most wounding of all womanly humiliations.

She chose a seat at some distance from him where fell the shadows of near draperies. There the lights of the rooms lay most muffled and low; she seemed most inaccessible, most with-

drawn. When she began to speak out of the shadows, her words were as old familiar words, long grouped together in the mind and each tested often as being true there. But startlingly they fell upon the hush, for always what is private and hidden within us sounds remote and alien across the air. Slowly, quietly, Miss Locke began:

"Each of us," she said, "cherishes some inner vision of the Elysian Fields with a chosen one, and you, Gridley, have had *your* vision. Men keep for themselves this thought of an ideal woman; women desire to bestow themselves upon the ideal man. When men judge the women they know by this woman whom they have never known, the women they know may disappoint and offend them. When women try the men to whom they are bound or are about to bind themselves by a hero who has never bound them, but by whom they would like to be bound, often there is sore lack for them; they may be broken women. This distant light of the Elysian Fields falls on every actual hearthstone. Many a time it puts out the patient, kindly, warming flame kindled there, leaving the two who sit there to look only at the Fields and the ashes. For the ideal, whether of man or woman, is a terrible judge to be judged by all one's life in all one's ways: its judgments feel no pity, they show no mercy, and they never cease. Still, if the actual fails, there is always the ideal to believe in; and there is a happiness for us not only in the things we may have, but in the things that remain forever beyond us.

"You have had your vision of the Elysian Fields. The vision most invited you when you most invited the vision—at a time in your life when no

woman you knew answered to your ideal of woman. You looked out upon the actual scene, looked over it, then looked away; and it is when one looks away from things as they are that one sees Elysium.

"As you looked, with nothing else before your eyes, certain little things waved and wavered before you. You noticed those little things, you were attracted by them. You believed they were imitations of that most human land, signals of a finer being who was there. It was I who waved these things before you, and you thought I must have seen this wonderful unknown. I had felt and fallen under her influence, I was imitating her for my selfish purposes, out of my need. You planned, through watching my faults, to discover her of the perfections. If you could not discover without inquiring of me, then you would inquire. It is thus that I now understand all of your visits to me—your little kindnesses, your smiles, the light in your eyes, the pressure of your hand, your whole calculation. And it is thus that I understand your coming to-night: you are here to ask me to guide you to the woman on the Elysian Fields, then to dismiss your guide."

Miss Locke completed in her way the story of their relationship. She waited to have Gridley disavow it if he wished, if he could. But Gridley made no response, had none he could make. Nor from the beginning to the end of Miss Locke's story did he speak or move or take his eyes from her face while his own face was convulsed by his emotions.

"I cannot guide you further," continued Miss Locke with a quietness of life. "You have reached the end of the road."

After a long pause, suddenly bending forward out of the shadows, she added with all the meaning she could put into her words:

"I am the woman you have been seeking."

She waited for him to grasp the intangible, the elusive truth. Perceiving that he did not do this, she repeated certain of his own words to him:

"If, as you say, an influence has fallen upon you as from an unseen instrument, I am the unseen instrument. If all that is best in your nature has moved toward another, I am that other."

The hush of the rooms deepened. Miss Locke finally cried out to Gridley in despair of his understanding:

"The little things that have waved and wavered before you, that you have noticed and gathered up and loved, they do make a woman! They do make an unknown! But they make *me—me*, that unknown!"

The long silence of the rooms!

When next she spoke, it was once more with a quietness of the unalterable:

"Oh, listen, if you can even little understand!

"Those who are most fortunate in life, those who are most happy, are blinded. Your good fortune has blinded you. While you have looked on ahead, as many of us do, at visions of things which were to make you more fortunate and happier still, you have never, as most of us must, turned and looked backward. Backward at the road of the past. At the one unknown human road down which we have all come and along which we all move together. You have never observed what crowds that road so thickly—the houses of the past, the countless an-

cestral shapes which follow the living down the road, age after age, never stopping. Old human dwellings, inhabited and used up time and again, generation after generation. Lived in, and worn out, and returned to the earth as its dust, yet constantly regathering that dust and rebuilding it about the unborn. Old bodies that follow down the road, and whenever and wherever the living make their only start, creep around them and inclose them. Hold them fast. Bend them and shape them to the service of the dead—the dead who died when the earth was a ruder earth and the world a darker world. Backs and shoulders still broadened under loads dropped ages ago. Jaws of primitive habit. Hands and feet coarsened by exposure and toil which ended in lost times. Eyes that looked out with apathy and hopelessness or with fear and helplessness upon their world. Now still heavy and expressionless, still frightened, in our world of safety and victory and joy. Hair sparse and white that was blown away through the winters of a thousand lives, returning to the heads of children as though it must come back with every spring.

"You have never seen this, never thought of it! You could afford to forget; you have been adequately and splendidly bodied. It is they, the grievously, wrongfully housed, who can see the road which has reached them and realize what has come along; who, loving all that is lovely, find themselves imprisoned in the unlovable. So that all they can do is to give others some few vain signals of where they are and of what they are; who *must* utter themselves somehow within their walls! Who know that they will never be known."

Life crowded into the silent rooms.

"I do not remember how long ago it was—I was a child—when I began to form some true image of myself. Began to build about myself the house that I should have liked to live in, that would have denoted me fairly." Miss Locke glanced at a table on which some books were strewn. "I have made only now an outer picture of the inner picture. I have placed it at the entrance to my world of books. I have said, 'All ye who enter here—this world of visions and dreams—think of me as I am!'"

Miss Locke rose, took a volume from a table, opened it at her book-plate, placed it in Gridley's hands, and returned to her seat.

"My picture! Myself in the house of nature that I should have chosen and that I always think of myself as dwelling in! Myself—herself there! I imagine her ways. I know them better than I know my own. I constantly do what she would do. Sometimes consciously, more often perhaps unconsciously, I copy *her*! The little things you have gathered falsely from me, how naturally they would belong to her! They are not her mannerisms, but her manners; they are not her hypocrisies, but her sincerities. The hair that will not stay in place, that will escape, and that must be arranged by the hand! The effortless arm! The waist that is shaped to be clasped! The dancing feet, the arching neck! All as you saw them that first night at the ball or as you have seen them since! Her grace! Her joy in music! Her book some hapless tale of young lovers who were happy ages ago—and unhappy! There is nothing she could not wear! Nothing is too beautiful

for her! Her handkerchiefs are dipped in beds of violets!"

Gridley, in a daze, in a stupor, in the emptiness and longing of his soul, in consternation and despair, sat looking at the picture and looking at Miss Locke. His eyes wandering from the one to the other, from the undesired woman in the chair to the desired woman of his imagination.

Life was in the rooms with them.

Tears gathered in Miss Locke's eyes.

"There I am on the Elysian Fields! With the lover who sees me as I am and who plays for me to dance to him. A lover I shall never have!"

Miss Locke arose as though it were the end of her story. Gridley had laid the book aside. He sat looking to where the great fabric of an ideal hope and passion had vanished into unattainable beauty.

"You were going?" inquired Miss Locke, coming forward.

She went out awkwardly into the hall, Gridley following barely. Without good night she began to ascend the staircase. At the proud bend of it she turned and stood looking down at Gridley, who stood looking up at her, white, bewildered, stunned; left at the end of his road; standing there wounded sacredly; not knowing where there was help for his wound.

Presently, not from the woman on the staircase, but from the woman unrealized, lost to the loveliness of things, there floated down like echoes faint and far, the soul of an unknown, the end of their story:

"I loved you."

Miss Locke passed from view.

The Houses of the Past. The Elysian Fields.

